



Active After-school Communities

What is it?

As part of the Australian Government's \$116 million *Building a Healthy, Active Australia* package, the government is spending \$90 million over four years to establish an after school physical activity programme known as *Active After-school Communities*. This programme will provide Australian families with a convenient and practical opportunity to support the healthy development of their primary school aged children (aged five to 12 years). It includes funding for small grants to participating schools and organisations to help deliver the programme.

Why is it needed?

Physical activity can play a major role in maintaining healthy body weight and reducing the chances of developing heart disease and diabetes. It also has substantial benefits in terms of social interaction, mental alertness and motor skills.

Some children are not spending as much time engaged in physical activity, particularly after school, as children in previous generations. Recent studies suggest that about 40 per cent of children are missing out on outside school hours sporting activity. This is contributing to the fact that there are currently 1.5 million young people under the age of 18 in Australia who are either overweight or obese. Once children or adolescents are overweight, it is difficult for them to get back to a healthy weight.

What will it do?

The Australian Government is taking very seriously the potential health problems facing the Australian community and the benefits of ensuring that children have sufficient supervised opportunities for physical activity during the course of the day. The government is therefore supporting a national structured health and physical activity programme that emphasises safe and fun experiences for five to 12 year olds. This programme will draw on the skills, expertise and dedication of sporting and community organisations across Australia.

Over 170 physical activity coordinators will work with these organisations at national, state and regional levels to help establish after-school hours physical activity programmes in primary schools and approved outside school hours care services at no extra cost to families.

Initially about 3,250 primary schools and approved outside school hours care services will be involved in working with local community sporting organisations to run physical activity programmes after school hours. This initiative will allow about 150,000 children to participate in physical activity programmes which are flexibly designed to meet the needs of each community in a safe, secure and supervised environment after school. It will complement the new requirements to include a minimum level of physical activity in school curricula and will include the provision of small grants to assist participating schools, approved outside school hours care services, and sporting and community organisations to help facilitate delivery of the programme.

When will the programme begin?

The programme will begin in Term 1 of the 2005 school year.

How do I get involved?

Australian primary schools and approved outside school hours care services will be invited to participate in the programme by meeting certain selection criteria. National sporting organisations will be participating in this programme and local sporting and community organisations are also encouraged to become involved.

Providing additional opportunities for children to be active is only part of the solution. Playing with your children on weekends will encourage them to be active, improve their coordination and skills, and further build their confidence.

More information on this Australian Government initiative can be found at www.healthyactive.gov.au